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L A N D U S E  
A N D Z O N I N G

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*Photo: Carol R. Johnson and Associates, Inc.*

**B**ecause of its prime location and historical development patterns, East Cambridge has all of the elements of a small city within a city. Transportation access by the Lechmere Canal and the railroad in the late nineteenth century, as well as access by the regional highways and public transportation in this century, led to the development of a large industrial district which encircles a densely-built residential community. Favorable location and transportation access continue to spur today's redevelopment in East Cambridge.

The development of the Middlesex County Courthouse and offices in the 19th and 20th centuries was another important feature of the neighborhood's land use development. In addition, a neighborhood-oriented commercial area on Cambridge Street and the predominance of churches, ethnic clubs and service agencies meet the needs of a diverse population.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the decline of the manufacturing base led to the closing of many East Cambridge factories. The redevelopment of these closed factories for office use coupled

with the development of new residential condominiums and expansion of open space are reshaping the historic land use patterns.

This chapter examines the key land use and zoning characteristics and changes which have occurred since 1980, assesses the development potential in the commercial and industrial areas, and recommends specific strategies for controlling and managing future growth in East Cambridge.

## General Land Uses

East Cambridge is comprised of a diversity of land uses, including: commercial (30%), industrial (30%), residential (22%), vacant land and parking (6%), open space (5%), institutional/government (4%), and utilities (3%). (See Land Use Map on following page).

There have been significant land use changes in East Cambridge since 1978 as the table below indicates:

### East Cambridge Land Use Changes, 1978-1988

Use	1978		1988		Change	
	in acres	%	in acres	%	in acres	%
Commercial	68	18%	113	30%	45	66%
Industrial	152	41%	111	30%	41	(27%)
Residential	75	20%	82	22%	7	9%
Institution/ Government	16	4%	14	4%	(2)	(13%)
Open Space	8	2%	21	5%	13	62%
Vacant/Parking	45	12%	23	6%	(22)	(49%)
Utilities	11	3%	11	3%	-0-	-0-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Source: Cambridge Community Development Department Land Use Inventory, 1978 and 1988.

The highlights of these land use changes are:

- Commercial uses have increased by 45 acres or 66%.
- Open space has increased by 13 acres or 62%.
- Vacant land has decreased by 22 acres or 49%.
- Industrial uses have decreased by 41 acres or 27%.

Overall, the Lechmere Triangle and Riverfront area has changed most dramatically, including:

- An increase of over 25 acres of commercial uses (retail and office) or over 3.8 million square feet of development. This figure includes some projects that have been approved, but not yet constructed.
- An increase of approximately 600 units of housing.
- An increase in 13 acres of open space.
- A decrease in the amount of vacant land and parking, which has primarily been converted to commercial and open space uses.

## Zoning

There has been a significant downzoning of the periphery of the East Cambridge neighborhood (Riverfront, Fulkerson Street) over the past ten years. During this period, only the Residential C-1 district and the Business A district on Cambridge Street have remained the same zoning designation.

In 1978, nearly two-thirds of the neighborhood was zoned as Industry B—which is the most permissive zoning district in the city. Today, North Point (the 75-acre area north of McGrath Highway) is the last remaining large area zoned as Industry B. A comprehensive rezoning and urban design plan for North Point is presently underway. In addition, a relatively small area zoned as Industry B on Gore Street/Rufo Road was recently downzoned to Business A-2 and open space.

There are 14 zoning districts in East Cambridge. (See East Cambridge zoning table and map on following pages). In general, the zones which allow the most amount of development are on the periphery of the residential neighborhood. The largest zones are as follows:

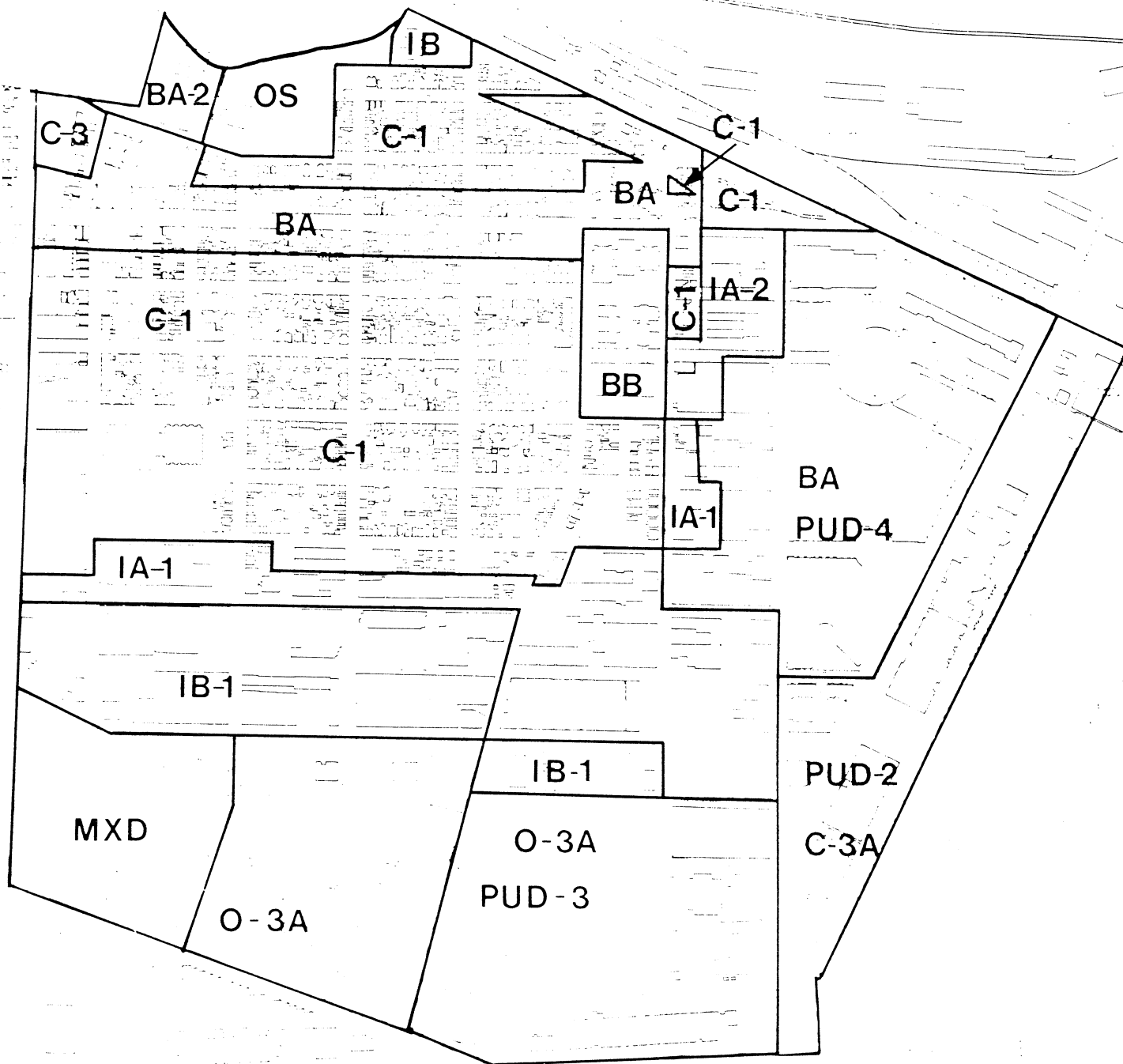
- All of the residential area is zoned C-1, which is comparable to the existing scale of residential structures in the neighborhood.
- The area between First and Third Streets is primarily zoned Industry A-1 and Business A.
- The industrial area — between Third and Fulkerson south of Charles Street — is largely an Industry B-1 zone.
- The Binney Street/Broad Canal area is zoned O-3A.

East Cambridge has three planned unit development districts (PUD), which have been integral to the redevelopment of the Lechmere Triangle and Riverfront area. These districts generally allow (by special permit) more intensity and types of uses than the base zone, but they also require design review and open space contributions.

## East Cambridge Zoning Summary, 1988

Zone	Use	FAR*	Maximum Height
C-1	Residential	.75	35'
C-3	Residential	3.0	Unlimited
C-3A	Residential	3.0	120'
BA	Commercial	1.0	35'
	Residential	1.75	85'
BA-2	Commercial	1.0	45'
	Residential	1.75	45'
BB	Commercial	4.0	Unlimited
IA-1	Industrial, Commercial, Residential	1.25	45'
IA-2	Industrial, Commercial, Residential	4.0	70'
IB-1	Industrial, Commercial	3.0	70'
IB	Industrial, Commercial	4.0	none
O3A	Residential, Commercial	3.0	120'
PUD-2	Residential, Commercial	3.0	120'
PUD-3	Offices	3.0	230'
PUD-4	Residential, Commercial	2.0	85'
MXD	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	3.0	120'

\*FAR or Floor Area Ratio defines the amount of gross floor area that can be built on a particular lot. For example, if a lot size is 10,000 square feet and has a 1.0 FAR, then the maximum amount of development on that lot is 10,000 square feet; if the FAR is 2.0, then the maximum amount of development is 20,000 square feet.



## EAST CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

### EXISTING ZONING

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development Department

January, 1988

## Potential Development

The residential district is likely to remain relatively unchanged in the future because it is already densely built at or above the current C-1 zoning limitations. But the majority of sites in the non-residential districts are likely to change in use or to be developed more intensively in the next ten to twenty years. (The map on the following page indicates these specific sites).

There are 12 parcels on which 15,000-50,000 square feet of additional development could occur. More significantly, there are 14 parcels under separate ownership on which 50,000 square feet or more of additional development could occur. Many of these sites are presently used as parking lots and vacant land. (The map on page 43 shows the location of these key sites and the accompanying table identifies the businesses and the amount of development potential.) The largest development sites are the Commonwealth Energy parking lot, the Department of Transportation lands and the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority urban renewal parcels, all located in the Broad Canal area, south of Binney Street. Combined, these sites total approximately 1.5 million square feet or 36 acres and allow up to approximately 3.54 million square feet of new development.

Elsewhere, substantial additional development could also occur if several parcels are assembled. The likelihood of assembling parcels depends upon several factors, including the size and configuration of the parcels, building condition, the number of owners in the block, excess development potential and general economic conditions. An analysis of 23 block areas where land assembly could occur shows that a maximum of 675,000 square feet of new development could occur between First and Third Streets, and approximately 650,000 square feet of development could occur in the industrial district between Third Street and Fulkerson

Street. (See East Cambridge Business Inventory Map in Appendix II). It is difficult to predict how much land assembly will occur over a given period of time, but its potential should be noted.

## Neighborhood-Wide Survey (Bell Associates)

In addition to the resident survey information on demographics and quality of life issues presented in the two previous chapters, residents were also asked specific questions about development issues in East Cambridge. Some of the highlights are:

(1) Significantly more East Cambridge residents think development in the Riverfront area has had a positive effect on the neighborhood rather than a negative effect. This sentiment is stronger among long-term residents than newer residents.

- 40% believe Riverfront development has had a positive effect, 25% said it has been negative and 24% said the development has had no effect.
- 55% of residents who have lived in the neighborhood 21 years or more think the Riverfront development has been positive; 25% of residents 1-4 years think this development has been positive.

(2) East Cambridge residents also think the development in the Riverfront area has been even more beneficial to the City as a whole.

- 56% of residents said the Riverfront development has been positive for the City as a whole, 11% said it has been negative and 17% said it has had no effect on the City.

(3) Most East Cambridge residents think development pressures cause problems for the neighborhood.

- 47% said development pressures are a major problem, 15% said they are a minor problem and 20% said they are not a problem.

**East Cambridge Potential Development  
Parcels with 50,000 Square Feet or More of  
Potential Development**

Parcel #	Use	Existing Built	Potential Residential	Potential Commercial
1	CanAM/Kendall Press	51,200	68,800	68,800
2	Parking Lot	-0-	50,000	50,000
3	Parking Lot	-0-	99,868	99,868
4	Parking Lot	-0-	NA	90,321
5	McLaughlin Elevator	57,200	NA	80,800
6	Thypin Steel	100,000	NA	220,208
7	Camb.Electric Motor/Javelin	76,000	NA	125,063
8	Boston Concession Group	76,499	110,892	110,892
9	Metro Pipe	21,900	NA	138,939
10	Vacant	-0-	81,068	NA
11	Vacant	-0-	244,200	244,200
12	Vacant	-0-	561,724	561,724
13	Department of Transportation	40,000	790,469	790,469
14	Parking Lot	-0-	1,500,000	1,500,000
<b>TOTAL SQUARE FEET</b>		<b>532,799</b>	<b>3,507,021</b>	<b>4,081,284</b>

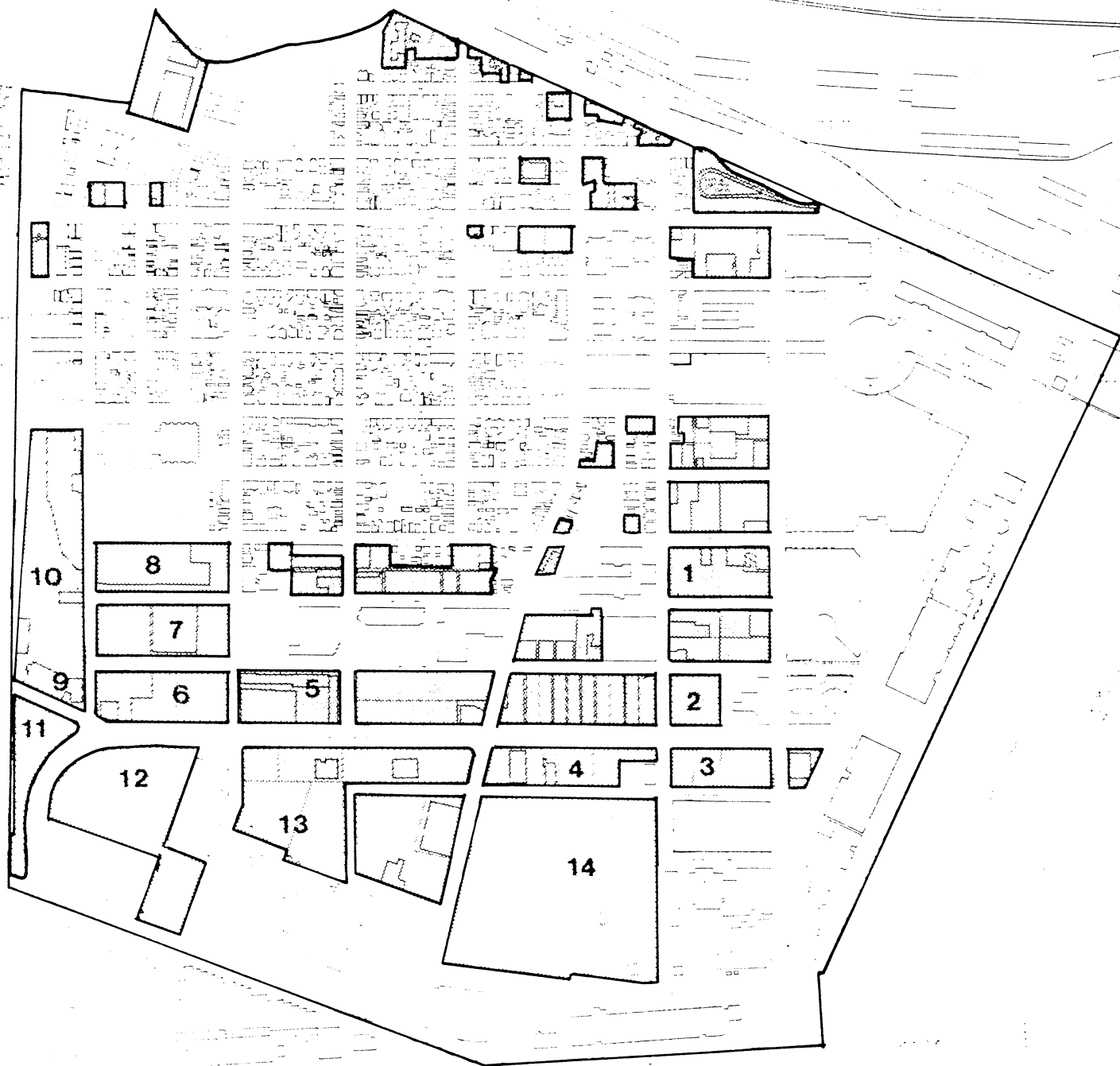
(4) When asked about the positive effects of development, residents most often cited the upgraded physical quality (27%), improved economic conditions (22%) and improvement and development of new buildings (18%).

(5) When asked about the negative effects of development, residents most often cited parking and traffic problems (27%), high housing costs (26%), changing population (22%) and overcrowded conditions (14%).

**Neighborhood Organization  
Survey (Community  
Development Department)**

(1) Members of the East Cambridge Stabilization Committee and Planning Team are more negative about development issues than the larger neighborhood.

- 40% of neighborhood group members think development in the Riverfront has been positive, 50% think it has been negative, and 10% said it has had no effect.



- The shaded areas refer to sites that may change or be developed in the next ten years.
- The numbered sites are those which allow at least 50,000 square feet of new potential development. (See table on next page.)

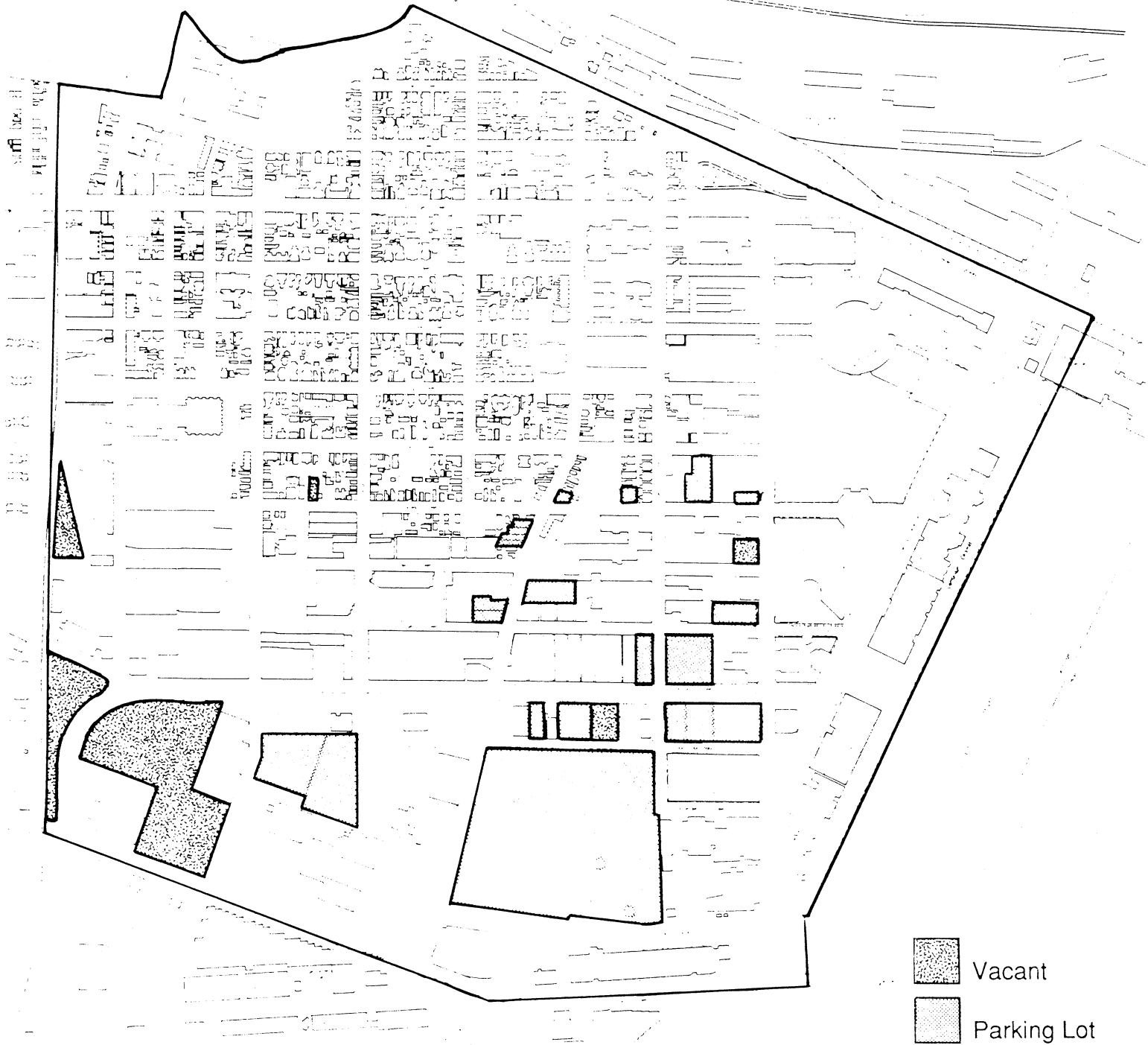
## EAST CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

### SOFT AREAS

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development Department  
January, 1988





## EAST CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

### PARKING AND VACANT LOTS

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development Department  
January, 1988

(2) The overwhelming majority of Stabilization and Planning Team members would like to see more development of rental housing.

- When asked what kinds of development they would like to see in their neighborhood, 82% said rental housing, 29% said mixed use development, 24% said retail shops, and 18% did not want to see any new development at all.

## Study Committee Concerns

(1) *Potential for Overdevelopment:* Without adequate controls, Committee members fear East Cambridge will become overdeveloped in the near future, placing additional strains on city services, traffic, parking, and the overall quality of life. The Committee views the continued development on the periphery of the residential neighborhood as having the effect of “walling in” the residential area.

While the Committee recognizes that the neighborhood was significantly downzoned in 1978, the cumulative effect of new development in the periphery of the neighborhood requires a careful re-examination of the industrial and planned unit development (PUD) zones.

(2) *First Street to Third Street:* As the River-front area continues to develop, there will be greater market pressure to redevelop much of First Street. The Committee wants to prevent the development of buildings with an internal orientation, such as malls, on First Street and prefers a mix of commercial and residential uses in this area.

(3) *Commonwealth Energy Site:* In particular, the Committee is concerned about the amount of development (both density and height) allowed on the Commonwealth Energy parking lots. This site is approximately 500,000 square feet and is under single ownership. Approximately 1.5 million square feet could be developed on this site.

(4) *Industry B-1 Zone:* The IB-1 zone (between Charles between Fulkerson and Third) may allow too much potential development. This zone has a 3.0 floor area ratio and 70 foot height limit.

(5) *Notification of Development Projects:* East Cambridge residents are often not informed of proposed development projects early enough—especially those being built as-of-right—and therefore, do not have an opportunity to communicate their comments and opinions to city officials and developers.

(6) *Residential Abutting Industrial:* The residential uses next to industrial uses, such as on Charles, Second and Fulkerson Streets, are not protected enough against negative impacts, such as truck traffic, pollution, and noise.

(7) *Truck Traffic:* Truck traffic through and along the edges of the neighborhood could become worse as a result of new development.

(8) *Development of Parking Lots:* If parking lots scattered between First and Third Streets are developed into offices or other uses, it could worsen the shortage of parking in East Cambridge.

## Land Use Recommendations

(1) Undertake a study to rezone the areas that include First to Second Street, the office districts south of Binney Street and the industrial area between Charles and Binney Streets from Third Street to Fulkerson Street. (See map on page 49) As part of this process, the Community Development Department should work with a committee of residents and property owners to prepare a permanent rezoning petition for the above priority areas.

(2) Institute an interim zoning measure, which would place a uniform height and density limit in the areas that are being studied for permanent rezoning. This temporary zoning would protect the East Cambridge neighborhood against new, large-scale development that could otherwise occur during the rezoning process.

(3) Create a First Street Overlay District, which would:

- Encourage mixed use projects, especially a retail and housing mix.
- Promote the development of affordable housing.
- Create a unified image on First Street in which every project would be subject to design review.
- Reduce the amount of potential development.
- Reduce allowable heights of buildings adjacent to the residential area of Second Street.

(4) Consider rezoning the Commonwealth Energy site to achieve a reduction in allowable height and density.

(5) Study the rezoning of the IA-1/IB-1 zones (Fulkerson and Binney Streets) to promote mixed use development, including office, housing, light industry and an open space buffer along Fulkerson Street near the Metro Pipe site. The new zoning should promote compatible development with the existing residential area.

(6) The Community Development Department should work closely with the Inspectional Services Department and other city agencies to develop procedures by which abutters and relevant neighborhood groups are notified of proposed development projects filed with the city. Developers might be required to meet with residents before the project is approved or disapproved. While the neighborhood recommendations would be advisory, the developer and city should take the concerns and recommendations

of the neighborhood into account. The existing development consultation procedures in the zoning ordinance, which already apply to certain areas in the city, could be an appropriate mechanism to consider.

(7) If the U.S. Congress approves the sale of the federal Department of Transportation property on Binney Street, the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority and the Community Development Department should establish a neighborhood advisory committee to develop a master plan for the area. Building housing on this site, with a strong component of affordable housing, should be the principal development goal.

(8) Affordable housing development should be promoted along Fulkerson Street, south of the FAR Group projects, down to Binney Street.

(9) Assure that proper parking ratios are maintained as development occurs in the areas between First and Third Streets and in the industrial district. The Committee strongly believes that developers should be required to replace parking which is lost.

(10) Promote a strong visual and pedestrian connection from the development areas on the periphery of the neighborhood to the East Cambridge residential district as was done in the East Cambridge Riverfront district. These development areas should be viewed as an integral part of the East Cambridge residential neighborhood.

(11) If the city decides to reuse the old fire station on Third and Gore Streets, first priority should be given to reuse as a community service facility for East Cambridge residents.